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SUBJECT: Honduras TIP Update: EmbOffs Meet with Attorney
General and Supreme Court President on Prosecutions

REF: (A) Tegucigalpa 926

- (B) Tegucigalpa 576
- (C) Tegucigalpa 382
- (D) Tegucigalpa 116
- (E) Tegucigalpa 70
- (F) 03 Tegucigalpa 2965

1. Summary: EmbOffs met recently with the Honduran Attorney General and the Supreme Court President to emphasize the critical nature of successful prosecutions as part of an overall GOH strategy to combat trafficking in persons. Honduras has also been active in recent months on a number of trafficking in persons (TIP) fronts. This cable provides an update on these efforts. End Summary.

EmbOffs Meet With AG and SC President

2. PolCouns and PolOff met June 2 with Attorney General (AG) Ramon Ovidio Navarro and his assistant Jaime Banegas (subsequently sworn in as Director of Prosecutors June 9), and June 7 with Supreme Court (SC) President Vilma Morales to emphasize the critical nature of successful prosecutions as part of an overall GOH strategy to combat trafficking in persons. PolOffs gave both copies of the 2003 TIP, Human Rights, and Supporting Human Rights and Democracy reports in Spanish. PolOffs emphasized that the 2004 TIP report would be released shortly and UNDERSCORED the importance of TIP in the bilateral agenda.

3. The AG said the Public Ministry, which he heads and includes all prosecutors, is committed to combating TIP and to sharing information with the Embassy. PolOff noted the close contact between EmbOffs and the Special Prosecutors for Organized Crime, Children's Issues, and Women's Issues. The AG agreed this was important, and subsequently held a meeting June 7 with prosecutors from the Organized Crime and Children's Issues offices to discuss Public Ministry efforts against TIP and commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC) crimes. He welcomed G/TIP-funded training via DOJ/OPDAT planned for later this year. He pledged that the GOH would make a concerted effort this year to prosecute TIP cases more aggressively.

4. The Supreme Court President, who oversees the entire judiciary, said there is a growing knowledge of TIP crimes among judges, and the links to other crimes such as document fraud and money laundering. She also pledged to raise the importance of combating TIP and TIP-related crimes at the next meeting of the GOH's inter-agency committee on the application of the new Code of Criminal Procedure. She explained that a revision of the Penal Code is under consideration and suggested that it would be an opportunity to strengthen laws against TIP. Post subsequently provided her with a copy of the USG's model TIP law for consideration.

5. Morales said she understood the importance of following cases all the way through to the end. She noted that in some instances, there were alleged threats against judges involved in TIP-related cases. (Note: Post notes that there was also speculation about possible corruption by judges in those cases. End Note.)

6. PolOffs discussed with both the AG and SC President the importance of the Chinese cases, particularly the December 2003 arrests of Chinese naturalized Hondurans Hu Weng Rong and He Jia Bin in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, respectively, for involvement in an alien smuggling ring for PRC nationals using fraudulent documents. Both are still in jail. (See refs D-F and septel for more information on the various Chinese smuggling cases.) The AG and SC President have discussed these cases together and have been very responsive to U.S. interest in these cases.

GOH Continues Raids of Massage Parlors

7. Honduran authorities continue to take action against the

commercial sexual exploitation of children in Honduras. Most recently, on May 1 three owners of massage parlors were arrested (two Hondurans and one Nicaraguan) and seven of these establishments were closed. Three of the seven had minor children working at the time they were raided. The Special Prosecutor for Children has been and continues to conduct operations jointly with the police, the Honduran Institute for Children and the Family (IHNFA), judges, and Casa Alianza, to rescue CSEC victims and arrest and prosecute those responsible for these victims' exploitation.

Casa Alianza Signs Agreement with Immigration

18. The NGO Casa Alianza signed an agreement with the Ministry of Government and Justice and the Directorate of Immigration on April 22 to protect children that are TIP/CSEC victims outside Honduras. As part of the agreement, the GOH committed to informing Casa Alianza about any repatriation of minors.

TIP Seminars Planned for August

19. The Honduran government is planning seminars for late August in the Caribbean coast cities of Tela (a tourist destination) and Puerto Cortes on the prevention and eradication of the CSEC and trafficking in women and children. The seminars are modeled after seminars held in Tegucigalpa and La Ceiba in 2003, and in San Pedro Sula and Santa Rosa de Copan in January 22-23, 2004. The Embassy brought in first a U.S. NGO expert and then G/TIP Senior Reporting Officer Phil Linderman (ref C) to be keynote speakers at the seminars. The Embassy is working with IIP to arrange to bring in the same NGO expert in August (ref A and subsequent e-mails).

Palmer